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AUTHOR Sadowski, Cyril J.; Woodward, Helen R.
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ABSTRACT

Several studies have shown that teachers' locus of control orientations are differentially related to attitudes about teaching and classroom behavior. To investigate the relationship between teachers' locus of control and students' perceptions of classroom climate, academic responsibility, and grades, matched pairs of teachers from grades four through eight completed a teaching-specific locus of control measure. Their students (N=245) completed the Origin Climate Questionnaire and the Intellectual Achievement Responsibility Questionnaire. Current letter grades were also obtained for each student. Students with the more internally oriented teachers reported a more origin-line classroom climate, i.e., a classroom atmosphere in which students perceived the teacher as encouraging goal setting, responsibility, and self-confidence, and had higher grades than students with less internally oriented teachers. Teachers' locus of control orientations were not related to student-attributed responsibility, although within-class correlations indicated that attributed responsibility was positively related to perceived classroom climate and grades. The results suggest that further research needs to be directed toward delineating determinants of teachers' locus of control and the manner in which these orientations are conveyed to students. (Author/NRB)

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Teacher Locus of Control and Students'
Perceptions and Performance

Cyril J. Sadowski and Helen R. Woodward
Austin Peay State University

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Teacher Locus of Control and Students' Perceptions and Performance

Recently there has been renewed interest in teachers' attitudes thought to affect classroom events and student performance. One line of this work has focused on teachers' expectancies regarding students' performance and self-fulfilling prophecies (Braun, 1976; Cooper, 1979). Another line of research has focused on teachers' beliefs about their own ability to influence student performance and classroom events, i. e., their locus of control.

Within this latter area of research, a number of studies have shown that teachers' locus of control orientations are differentially related to attitudes about teaching and classroom behavior. Teachers with an internal locus of control orientation tend to hold less custodial beliefs about controlling students than do external teachers (Barfield & Burlingame, 1974; Taylor, 1980; Taylor, Sadowski, & Peacher, Note 1). This orientation also appears to be manifested in classroom practices. Internal teachers have been shown to give fewer disciplinary commands to students and encourage more self-directed behavior among students than do externals (Rose & Medway, 1981; Rose & Medway, Note 2).

DeCharms (1972, 1976) views such attitudes and behaviors as fostering an origin climate. An origin climate is a

classroom atmosphere in which students' perceive the teacher as encouraging goal setting, responsibility, and self-confidence. DeCharms contends such a climate enhances achievement by developing student initiative. His research shows that students in classes whose teachers volunteered to be trained in facilitating an origin climate achieved more than students whose teachers did not volunteer for such training. Other research (Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman, 1981; Sadowski & Woodward, 1981) indicates that students' perceptions of the extent to which their class approximates an origin climate correlate with their reported intrinsic motivation, responsibility for academic achievement, and grades.

The present study was undertaken to examine the relationship between teachers' locus of control and students' perceptions and academic performance. Since teachers' locus of control is related to attitudes and behaviors associated with differential classroom climates, it was hypothesized that students with more internally oriented teachers would perceive their classes as being more like an origin climate than students with less internally oriented teachers. Also, since an origin climate is thought to encourage student initiative, it was hypothesized that students with more internal teachers would report greater responsibility for academic outcomes than students with less internal teachers.

Finally, since teachers' locus of control has been shown to be related to student achievement (Murray & Staebler, 1974; Murray & Staebler, Note 3, Porter & Cohen, Note 4), it was hypothesized that students with more internal teachers would have higher grades than students with less internal teachers.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 14 teachers and 245 pupils from fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade classrooms in the Clarksville-Montgomery County, Tennessee school system. Pupil participation in the 14 classrooms ranged from 11 to 31. Participation was voluntary in all cases. For the children, both individual and parental consent was obtained.

Measures

Locus of Control Scale for Teachers (LCST). The LCST (Taylor et al., Note 1) is a 20-item Likert-type scale designed to measure teachers' beliefs that their own behavior influences student performance and classroom events. Items are balanced in terms of reflecting internal and external locus of control orientations. Response options ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" are scored on a 5-point continuum and summed over items. Higher scores reflect a greater internal locus of control orientation. Internal consistency, assessed in terms of the alpha coefficient, is reported as being .732 and the average corrected

item-total correlation as .337, based on a sample of 113 teachers. Test-retest reliability over a four-month period with a sample of 34 teachers is .575 (Sadowski, Taylor, Woodward, Peacher, & Martin, Note 5).

Origin Climate Questionnaire (OCQ). The OCQ (DeCharms, 1976) is a 24-item Likert-type scale which measures pupils' perceptions of teacher behaviors directed toward developing goal setting, responsibility, and self-confidence among students. Such activities are referred to as an origin climate. Verbal anchors of "Always," "Often," "Seldom," and "Never" are provided as response options. Half the items are worded positively and half worded negatively. Higher scores indicate the class is perceived as being more of an origin-like climate.

Intellectual Achievement Responsibility Questionnaire (IAR). The IAR (Crandall, Katkovsky, & Crandall, 1965) is composed of 34 forced-choice items. The items are evenly divided so that half measure acceptance of responsibility for positive academic outcomes (I+) and half measure acceptance of responsibility for negative academic outcomes (I-). Higher scores indicate greater acceptance of responsibility or an internal locus of control orientation.

Grades. Current letter grades for each participating student were obtained from the teachers. These were scored on a 5-point continuum, F = 0 through A = 4.

Procedure

The measures were obtained from both the teachers and students in one class period. Administration time ranged from approximately 25 to 45 minutes. Fifth and sixth graders rated their homeroom teachers and seventh and eighth graders rated their math teachers. Teachers were also asked to provide the letter grade they would assign for each pupil if the testing date were actually the grading period. Classrooms were matched within school and subject. Teachers were divided into high and low internal control, based on their LCST scores, within each matched pair.

Results

Teacher locus of control. Scores on the LCST ranged from 60 to 92, Mdn = 80. For the more internally oriented within each pair M = 83.71 and SD = 5.39. Among the less internally oriented within each pair M = 73.71 and SD = 7.57. The difference between the matched groups was significant, $t(6) = 3.14$, $p < .025$, one-tailed. Thus, while each participating teacher scored at or above the midpoint on the LCST, there was discrimination within the sample.

Student measures. Classroom means were the unit of analysis for the student measures. Means for OCQ, I+, I-, and grades for students of high and low LCST teachers are presented in Table 1. The multivariate analysis indicated

teacher locus of control was significantly related to differences in student responses, $F(4, 3) = 9.53$, $p < .05$, two-tailed. Students with high LCST teachers perceived their classrooms as having a more origin-like climate than did students with lower LCST teachers, $t(6) = 2.70$, $p < .05$, two-tailed. Also, the mean grade was higher among students whose teachers had higher LCST scores, $t(6) = 2.26$, $p < .05$, two-tailed. Teacher locus of control was not significantly related to student scores on I+, $t(6) = -1.38$, or I-, $t(6) = 1.24$.

Insert Table 1 about here

Correlations among student measures. To further examine the relationships among student responses, correlations within each classroom were obtained and these were averaged to get a more reliable estimate (Snedecor & Cochran, 1967). The average correlations among the student measures are presented in Table 2. The OCQ scores correlated positively and significantly with I+, $\bar{r}(217) = .258$, $p < .001$, I-, $\bar{r}(217) = .167$, $p < .05$, and grades, $\bar{r}(217) = .228$, $p < .005$. Moreover, I+ correlated positively and significantly with grades, $\bar{r}(217) = .137$, $p < .05$, as did I-, $\bar{r}(217) = .202$, $p < .005$.

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion

The results of this study indicate teachers' locus of control is related to students' perceptions and performance. Teachers with more of an internal locus of control are seen by their students as fostering more of an origin-like climate in their classes than are those with less of an internal orientation, and students of the former show greater academic achievement. These results must be considered cautiously due to the cross-sectional methodology and the use of teacher-assigned grades as an index of achievement. However, these findings are consistent with the longitudinal study by Deci et al. which indicated that teacher characteristics are related to classroom climate differences and increases in intrinsic motivation and feelings of competence.

It is problematic that teacher locus of control was not consistently or significantly related to students' attributed responsibility for academic achievement. However, the within-classroom correlations indicated a positive correlation between responsibility and classroom climate, as well as between attributed responsibility and grades. Self-selection biases most likely resulted in a sample of more motivated teachers and students than would be expected by random assignment. This perhaps acted to attenuate the between-teacher comparisons due to the relatively small differences in locus of control among the teachers and

relatively high attributed responsibility scores among the students. Moreover, student attributed responsibility is less of a situation-specific characteristic than are classroom climate and grades, so it might be expected to be less strongly related to a characteristic of any specific teacher than would the other variables.

Considering that the sampling biases in this study would favor the null hypothesis, the present results are rather striking. Teachers' locus of control orientations are reflected in different classroom climates and student performance. Further work needs to be directed toward delineating determinants of teachers' locus of control and how these orientations are conveyed to students.

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Table 1

Mean Responses for Students with High and Low LCST Teachers

Student Measure	Teacher Internality	
	High	Low
Origin Climate	69.30	65.60
Responsibility for Success (I+)	12.69	13.15
Responsibility for Failure (I-)	11.18	10.82
Grades	3.08	2.65

Note. N = 14 classrooms.

Table 2

Average Within-Classroom Correlations Among Student Measures

Student Measure	1	2	3
1. Origin Climate	.258***	.167*	.228**
2. Responsibility for Success (I+)	---	.299***	.137*
3. Responsibility for Failure (I-)		---	.202**
4. Grades			---

* $p < .05$.** $p < .005$.*** $p < .001$.